

A New Obedience

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.
Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.*
(John 13:34)



Lenten Devotions

Part 2
(March 28 – April 17, 2022)

Pastor Tom Maehl
First Lutheran Church, Waltham, MA

Table of Contents

Part 3: Implications for our Life in Community

Days following the Fourth Sunday in Lent (March 28-April 1, 2022)

Monday	Deuteronomy 6:1-2	Luke 13:6-9	Fear of the Lord
Tuesday	Deuteronomy 6: 3	Luke 12:35-40	Diligence
Wednesday	Deuteronomy 6:4-9	Luke 12:49-53	Love of God
Thursday	Deuteronomy 6:10-12	Luke 17:11-19	Gratitude
Friday	Deuteronomy 8:12-18	Luke 16:10-13	Sharing

Days following the Fifth Sunday in Lent

Monday	Deuteronomy 10:12-13	Luke 17:7-10	Serving
Tuesday	Deuteronomy 10:16-19	Luke 7:36-47	Hospitality
Wednesday	Deuteronomy 10:20-22	Luke 18:35-43	Worship
Thursday	Deuteronomy 14:22-23	Luke 21:1-4	Offerings
Friday	Deuteronomy 15:7-11	Luke 12:32-34	Generosity

Part 4: Life in Christ:

Holy Week (April 11-17, 2022)

Monday	Deuteronomy 18:15-18	Luke 6:20-26	Jesus' devotion
Tuesday	Deuteronomy 26:1-10	Luke 6:27-31	Jesus' offering
Wednesday	Deuteronomy 27:1-3	Luke 6:32-38	Jesus' obedience
Thursday	Deuteronomy 30:1-5	Luke 23:39-43	Jesus' compassion
Good Friday	Deuteronomy 30:6-10	Luke 23:44-49	Jesus' sacrifice

Epilogue

Holy Sat.	Deuteronomy 30:15-20	Luke 23:50-56	God's love
Easter	Deuteronomy 31:7-8	Luke 24:1-11	Resurrection Promise

Monday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent, Fear of the Lord

First Reading: Deuteronomy 6:1-2

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the LORD your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, ²so that you and your children and your children’s children may fear the LORD your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long.

Background: The call to maintain an adequate ‘Fear of the Lord’ shows up dozens of times in the Bible; both Psalms and Proverbs tie it to wisdom, e.g. “*The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*”¹ ‘Fear of the Lord’, however, is not the same as being afraid of God; for the scriptures also repeatedly insist that we are to ‘*Fear Not.*’ For example, speaking for God Isaiah writes, “*Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.*”² If ‘Fear of the Lord’ is not about being afraid of God, then what is it about? Some would say it is about maintaining a reverent awe of the Holy God. Others would add that it issues a caution to be alert to life’s temptations, mindful that there are consequences to turning away from love.

Gospel Reading: Luke 13:6-9; 12:4-7

Then he [Jesus] told this parable: ‘A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. ⁷So he said to the gardener, “See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?” ⁸He replied, “Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. ⁹If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.”’

For Contemplation: Jesus has given us his one commandment, that we are to love one another. Elsewhere it is written, “*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.*”³ Love is the fruit we are called to bear; however, our love is not perfect, we fall short and so fear remains. At times we may turn away from the path of love because of greed, jealousy, or self-absorption; at other times it is our fear that pull us away. For example, perhaps we fear addressing conflict head on, or fear speaking or hearing truth. Are we not rightfully afraid of what might happen if, driven by fear rather than faith in God, we let hurts fester or repeatedly hide truth under the patina of lies?

- Jesus calls us to bear fruits of love. Where have you given or tasted this fruit recently?
- Where have you been stingy in offering this fruit, or reluctant to taste it when offered?
- When has God’s call to love, follow, or obey given you, in spite of fear, courage to act?

Prayer: O God, forgive me for failing to love as I ought. Give me the wisdom and the courage to go where love leads, to offer what love demands, and to taste and savor this fruit when offered to me. Amen.

¹ Psalm 111:10

² Isaiah 41:10

³ 1 John 4:18

Tuesday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent, Diligence

First Reading: Deuteronomy 6:3

Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

Background: Diligence for Moses and his community meant strict adherence to the clearly articulated demands of the Law. For us and for our community, the command to love God and love neighbor must always be reinterpreted and re-embodied.

Gospel Reading: Luke 12:35-40

'Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; ³⁶be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. ³⁷Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. ³⁸If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. 'But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁰You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.'

For Contemplation: *"Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."*⁴ St. Paul repeatedly describes the community of the Church as the body of Christ and urges his readers to remember that when we were baptized into Christ, we are made part of this body. This body, this community, this Church is called anew in every generation to be 'dressed for action,' that is to be diligent in ministry and mission. We all have a part to play in this; yet we do not have to play all the parts. There are seasons of life when we are called to take on more responsibility and seasons when we are invited to take on less. As a community, we are called to be diligent in worship and prayer, in serving and giving, in striving for justice and peace, in extending hospitality and offering encouragement, and in making space for delight and sabbath.

- What part are you playing in the life of the Church now?
- Where might God be calling you to greater diligence; or to stepping back?
- What other parts of the body might need your prayers and encouragement?

Prayer: Thank you, O God, for your healing, feeding, forgiveness, wisdom and guidance offered through the ministry of the Church. Thank you for the blessing of being woven together with others on my own faith journey. Inspire and strengthen those who lead and those who serve. Help me to play my part, as you would have me. Amen.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:27

Wednesday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent, Love of God

First Reading: Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. ⁵You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. ⁶Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. ⁷Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. ⁸Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, ⁹and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

Background: This is the primary commandment from which all others flow: to love God with heart, soul, and might. These words are what many Jewish people have written on a small piece of parchment and placed in a container called a mezuzah. The mezuzah is affixed to the main doorpost of the home as a daily reminder of the obligations that come with this commandment. We, followers of Jesus, have the same command; we simply live it out in differing ways.

Gospel Reading: Luke 12:49-53

[Jesus said,] 'I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! ⁵⁰I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! ⁵¹Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! ⁵²From now on, five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; ⁵³they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.'

For Contemplation: Love over time changes us. If we keep striving to place love of God and neighbor at the center, that will profoundly influence our values and our views. However, when we turn to the complex issues of the day, such as environmental care, economic policy, social justice, etc. we may find that we do not see eye to eye with others, even at times members of our own household. The community of the Church is a household of sorts too, and at times we end up disagreeing with other members of the body. This can be painful, but love of God and neighbor demands that we stay connected. With both listening and speaking, we must seek to discern together as a community where love is leading.

- Recall a time when you had a disagreement with another in your family or church? How did love (or lack of love) impact the situation?
- Consider one of the complex issues of our day where your views have shifted over time. How has love (or lack of love) been part of your discernment?
- Where might the command to 'Love God with heart, soul, & might' be calling you now?

Prayer: O God, you are Love⁵; and you command that I put Love at the center of my life. I confess, O Love, that all too often what is at the center of my life is me, with the desire that my will be done. Yet you have placed a desire deep within me for you, O Love. Help me to remember this Love placed deep within me, this Love that will never let me go. Amen.

⁵ Here and elsewhere, I capitalize 'Love' (as a proper noun) when referring to God who is Love.

Thursday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent, Gratitude

First Reading: Deuteronomy 6:10-12

When the LORD your God has brought you into the land that he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—a land with fine, large cities that you did not build, ¹¹houses filled with all sorts of goods that you did not fill, hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant—and when you have eaten your fill, ¹²take care that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Background: Human temptation is to look on the blessings of life and claim responsibility; saying or thinking, “My hard work, my intellect, my careful planning has gotten me all this.” Moses, however, reminds us that God has been at work through myriad generations and systems tilling the soil for our measure of intellect, planning, and work (however small or large) to bear fruit. When we forget God’s role in our wellbeing, we may sink into despair over how little we have accomplished or rise in pride over how much. Either way, we end up disconnected from those whom we have placed below or above us. To remember God’s provision through rituals of thanksgiving bring us back to earth. Gratitude grounds us in God.

Gospel Reading: Luke 17:11-19

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³they called out, saying, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!’ ¹⁴When he saw them, he said to them, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Then Jesus asked, ‘Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? ¹⁸Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?’ ¹⁹Then he said to him, ‘Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.’

For Contemplation: In this passage ten lepers are described as having been made clean, but only the one who returned to give thanks is described as being made well. Giving thanks to God has some mysterious power to make us well. Some people begin each day giving thanks for the gift of life, some give thanks for food at every meal, some give thanks for their baptism with every shower, some make concerted efforts to receive the Eucharist⁶ as often as possible. So too, for many, thanksgiving to God is deeply integrated in their work, serving, giving, and other aspects of life.

- How does being part of a Church community nurture gratitude in you?
- What are your rituals of remembering God’s blessings and giving thanks?
- Is there a ritual of remembering that God might be inviting you to take with more regularity?

Prayer: You who have been well-made by God, for what do you give thanks in this moment?

⁶ Eucharist, another name for Holy Communion, is a Greek word meaning Thanksgiving

Friday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent, Sharing

First Reading: Deuteronomy 8:12-18

When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, ¹³and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, ¹⁴then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, ¹⁵who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid waste-land with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, ¹⁶and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. ¹⁷Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gained me this wealth.' ¹⁸But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today.

Background: Moses continues his theme, reminding his hearers that comfort and wealth will tempt us to forget God. In the previous day's reflection, it was noted how rituals of thanksgiving can turn us again to God; today we focus on how sharing also has such power. Moses' words raise an important question; namely, if it is God's power and might that have been primary in my gaining this measure of wealth, then who, really, does this measure of wealth belong to? Me, and I am therefore the owner? Or God, and therefore I am a steward? Jesus answers, "Steward."

Gospel Reading: Luke: 16:10-13

'Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. ¹¹If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹²And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? ¹³No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.'

For Contemplation: Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our future is assured. We shall make it through life with God's continued provision. Then we too shall die and rise with Christ; and in the resurrection, all shall be healed. There is a great happy ending coming! In the meantime, life can be messy and complicated, and money is part of that. Companies cheat, taxes are unfairly garnered, churches receive donations from sinners, and all the money that flows through our accounts is somehow tainted. Thankfully, Jesus is releasing us from worry about financial purity, so that we might be freed for faithful and creative stewardship. All that we have belongs to God. Sharing with others, while delighting in life, has the power to turn us again to God who is the source of all provision, all healing, all life.

- Where do you discern God calling you to delight in what God has entrusted to you?
- Where do you discern God calling you to share?
- How does being part of a faith community help open your heart to delight and sharing?

Prayer: Thank you God for all you have entrusted to us. Keep forming and reforming us so that we might more deeply delight in life, and delight in being instruments of justice, mercy, and peace through what we share. Amen.

Monday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent, Serving

First Reading: Deuteronomy 10:12-13

So now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you? Only to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,¹³ and to keep the commandments of the LORD your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being.

Background: Here Moses is calling the people to serve God with heart and soul. Earlier he had instructed them to love God with heart and soul. Clearly serving is an aspect of love; there are other aspects too. Love calls us to gratitude and sabbath rest, to sharing meals and delighting in the gifts of life; and love calls us to serve.

Gospel Reading: Luke: 17:7-10

'Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from ploughing or tending sheep in the field, "Come here at once and take your place at the table"?⁸ Would you not rather say to him, "Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink"?⁹ Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded?¹⁰ So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, "We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!"'

For Contemplation: The fairy tale of Goldilocks and the Three Bears can be a fitting metaphor for life. Like the bear's porridge, chairs, and beds, often things can be either too hot or cold, big or small, hard or soft; it's hard to get it just right. The same goes with serving. There are opportunities for service in our families, local communities, church, and elsewhere. If we end up doing too little, we neglect God's call and miss out on the benefits that come with making a difference in the lives of others. If we overcommit, we will end up deeply out of rhythm and may eventually burn out. In community, we are called both to serve and to enjoy the benefits that come from the service of others; and there is no retirement age for this. One temptation is to, after years of service, say, "Well I've done my part, let others do the work now." To this Jesus replies, "Put on your apron and fix me supper."

- Consider the varied ways you have served others. How has this blessed you?
- How is the service of others blessing you this day?
- Mindful that there are seasons of life and that serving is but one aspect of love, where do you sense your current engagement in service is 'too hot or cold', or nearing 'just right'?

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for all the ways you bless me through the service of others, help me to better notice and show appreciation. So too, help me to discern where and when to step in and offer my gifts, and when to step back. May I be ever more deeply transformed by love. Amen.

Tuesday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent, Hospitality

First Reading: Deuteronomy 10:16-19

Circumcise, then, the foreskin of your heart, and do not be stubborn any longer. ¹⁷For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, ¹⁸who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. ¹⁹You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Background: The Israelites will be different and separate from all the neighboring tribes by their observance of the statutes, ordinances, and commandments that Moses is speaking to them. They will eat differently, dress differently, worship differently; to outsiders these practices may seem strange. Though different and separate, still they are to extend hospitality. Strangers will appear; some will simply be passing through, others will come fleeing hardship and will need food, clothing, and all that love demands. The human tendency is often to be fearful and stingy when confronted by the needs of a stranger. Moses understands that what might open hearts to compassion is keeping alive the memory that their ancestors were once strangers too.

Gospel Reading: Luke 7:36-47

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. ³⁷And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. ³⁸She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. ³⁹Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner.' ⁴⁰Jesus spoke up and said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' 'Teacher,' he replied, 'speak.' ⁴¹'A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴²When they could not pay, he cancelled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?' ⁴³Simon answered, 'I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the greater debt.' And Jesus said to him, 'You have judged rightly.' ⁴⁴Then turning towards the woman, he said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. ⁴⁵You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.'

For Contemplation:

- When were you, or your ancestors, strangers in need? Who provided?
- Have we been forgiven much or little? How does that influence our hospitality?
- How have you witnessed a community in some way transformed through the welcoming of a stranger?

Prayer: Keep us mindful, O God, of your astounding forgiveness, mercy, and care. Open our hearts to the needs of the stranger, as they are led to us, and as you command. Amen.

Wednesday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent, Worship

First Reading: Deuteronomy 10:20-22

You shall fear the LORD your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear. ²¹He is your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen. ²²Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons; and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in heaven.

Background: Worship has always been central to nurturing a living relationship with God. Though this passage does not specify the exact form of worship for the ancient Israelites, it reveals key aspects. For example, worship will include words of allegiance, “*By his name you shall swear;*” and praise, “*He is your praise;*” and remembering, “*He is your God who has done for you these great and awesome things;*” and thanksgiving, “*He has made you as numerous as the stars in heaven.*” Our worship is quite different, but still there are words of allegiance implicit in our creeds, and we too sing hymns of praise, and in celebrating Holy Communion there is always a deep remembering with thanksgiving.

Gospel Reading: Luke: 18:35-43

As he approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. ³⁶When he heard a crowd going by, he asked what was happening. ³⁷They told him, ‘Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.’ ³⁸Then he shouted, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ ³⁹Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet; but he shouted even more loudly, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ ⁴⁰Jesus stood still and ordered the man to be brought to him; and when he came near, he asked him, ⁴¹‘What do you want me to do for you?’ He said, ‘Lord, let me see again.’ ⁴²Jesus said to him, ‘Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.’ ⁴³Immediately he regained his sight and followed him, glorifying God; and all the people, when they saw it, praised God.

For Contemplation: Worship puts us in our rightful place. First, it places us within a community of people who are seeking to be nurtured in relationship with God, a rightful place. Then too, when like beggars on a bread line we walk empty handed to commune, acknowledging that we are not God and are therefore in need of help; that too is a rightful place. Likewise, when we pray, “Lord have mercy” (kyrie eleison), and then listen to the scriptures read and interpreted, we are placing ourselves in a position to be addressed by the Word of God, also our rightful place.

- How does worship nurture your relationship with God?
- For what in this moment do you cry to Jesus for mercy?
- Jesus asks, “*What do you want me to do for you?*” What is your reply today?

Prayer: Thank, O God, for the many opportunities we are offered to worship you without any danger of persecution, without fear. Inspire our worship; and through it keep speaking and healing, we beg you. Then too, please O God, open our eyes and ears to see and hear. Amen.

Thursday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent, Offerings

First Reading: Deuteronomy 14:22-23

Set apart a tithe of all the yield of your seed that is brought in yearly from the field. ²³In the presence of the LORD your God, in the place that he will choose as a dwelling for his name, you shall eat the tithe of your grain, your wine, and your oil, as well as the firstlings of your herd and flock, so that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.

Background: Mahatma Gandhi listed “Religion without sacrifice” as one of seven deadly sins.⁷ There are all kinds of sacrifices to which our religion might call us. Organizing our schedules to make space for worship and prayer requires a degree of sacrifice. Giving up my need to have my likes and opinions valued over others requires sacrifice. The call to serve that comes from the command to love my neighbor as myself requires sacrifice; then too there is a financial aspect to our relationship with God. Moses called for the heads of families (those who controlled all the wealth) to sacrifice a tithe (10%) of their crops to God. Notice in the passage above, they are instructed to enjoy sharing it together in community (this is not drudgery). By doing this, they will remember that all provision ultimately comes from God, and the community will thrive.

Gospel Reading: Luke: 21:1-4

He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; ²he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. ³He said, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; ⁴for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.’

For Contemplation: In Christ, we are freed from the demands of the law. The Church will often lift up the tithe as a model (for most people 10% is small enough that it won’t break them, and large enough that they will feel it and need to put a bit more trust in God to provide); however, there is no law. Consider how sad (and sinful) it would be if a billionaire gave away only 10%. Also consider the widow whom Jesus noticed giving her two meager coins, such faithfulness! Yet how sad that others are not sharing more in community so that she has more for her own needs.

- What sacrifices do you regularly make for your faith?
- When have you made a sacrifice that had the effect of drawing you closer to God?
- All money is ultimately invested somewhere: in a bank, in loved ones and friends, in our ourselves, in our Church, in other institutions, in the poor, and so on. Where might God be leading you to invest a bit more, and where perhaps a bit less?

Prayer: Thank you, O God, for so lavishly providing for me; and thank you for weaving me into a community where through my offerings and the offerings of others such blessings occur. Continue to renew and deepen my faith and love; and show me where best to invest. Amen.

⁷ The others are wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity, and politics without principle.

Friday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent, Generosity

First Reading: Deuteronomy 15:7-11

If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted towards your needy neighbor. ⁸You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. ⁹Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, 'The seventh year, the year of remission, is near', and therefore view your needy neighbor with hostility and give nothing; your neighbor might cry to the LORD against you, and you would incur guilt. ¹⁰Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. ¹¹Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.'

Background: An offering is a gift given out of faithfulness, perhaps with a sense of duty. Generosity is something else. Here, Moses appears to be commanding generosity; that, however, never works. You can't command an attitude, spirit, or disposition; it's like turning to a sad child and saying, "Snap out of it, be happy!" You can, however, invite a sad child to practice some concrete actions; "go outside and feel the warm sun on your face, take deep breaths, eat a piece of chocolate, sing a song with me, listen to me tell you a joke." Should you find yourself in a dark place of hard-hearted, tight-fistedness here's something to try (invites Moses), find people who are poor and needy and start giving them money, food, and other provision.

Gospel Reading: Luke 12:32-34

'Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell your possessions and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'

For Contemplation: Logic says that wherever your heart is, that is where you will invest your time and resources; money follows the heart. Jesus, however, turns it around to say that wherever your time and resources are invested, that is where your heart will follow. There are ways that we humans invest our time and resources that (over time) tend to close us off from others and constrict our living; and there are other ways that connect us to others fueling generosity.

- Whom do consider to possess a generous heart; what do you suspect is the root of that?
- Consider recent changes to how you have been investing your time and resources; in what way or ways do you sense your heart is following?
- Jesus says, "God is generous, desiring to take great pleasure in generously sharing the kingdom with us." How is the generosity of God calling to you in this moment?

Prayer: Thank you, O God, for your generous promise to be with me in all things. Help me to fear less and share more, and please O God save me from a cold heart. Amen.

Monday of Holy Week, Jesus' devotion

First Reading: Deuteronomy 18:15-18

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. ¹⁶This is what you requested of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: 'If I hear the voice of the LORD my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die.' ¹⁷Then the LORD replied to me: 'They are right in what they have said. ¹⁸I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command.

Background: A prophet is one who speaks for God. Moses has been faithfully serving this role; however, at the end of Deuteronomy Moses will die and God will need to communicate through others in the generations that follow. Prophets will arise; though often the true prophets are not welcomed during the time of their speaking because their words are challenging, only a generation or more later are they acknowledged. Jesus was one who truly spoke for God.

Gospel Reading: Luke 6:20-26

Then he [Jesus] looked up at his disciples and said:

'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

'Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

'Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

'Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. ²³Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

'But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

'Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.

'Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.

'Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

For Contemplation: It is now holy week, and our attention turns firmly to Jesus. Jesus not only speaks for God; Jesus also fully lives out the words that he speaks. Jesus is poor and hungry. Jesus weeps, and by the end of this week he will be crucified because he is hated, excluded, reviled, and defamed; all of this for us, and for the rest of humanity. Way back on the first day of Lent, on Ash Wednesday, the focus was on our devotion. Now, as we draw near the end of Lent let us acknowledge that our limited attempts at devotion are a lovely and appropriate response to the grace of God, but it is the devotion of Jesus and the grace of God that saves us.

- If (in your devotion) you have given up or taken on something for Lent, sit quietly and contemplate on your success or failure in that discipline. Is there anything God might wish to reveal to you in that?
- It is grace of God in Christ that saves us. In what way or ways might you have been trying to save yourself this Lent? Anything you need to let go this week?
- In what ways has grace been carrying you?

Prayer: Thank you Jesus for your devotion, and for your love of me. Help me to better receive grace, grow in grace, and offer grace to others. Thank you for saving me by grace. Amen.

Tuesday of Holy Week, Jesus' offering

First Reading: Deuteronomy 26:1-10

When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, ²you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. ³You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, 'Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us.' ⁴When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, ⁵you shall make this response before the LORD your God: 'A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. ⁶When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, ⁷we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; ⁹and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me.' You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God.

Background: Moses is calling the Israelites to practice 'first fruit' giving; that is the making of an offering to God as the first thing one does with assets. The giver is also instructed to remember by telling and retelling the story of deliverance while the offering is being made; this is intended to keep the giver grounded in God. Notice that every time this process is enacted, there is a giver, an offering, a priest who is a mediator of sorts, and God.

Gospel Reading: Luke 6:27-31

'But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you.

For Contemplation: Jesus, who will be crucified by his enemies, will embody his own words as he continues to love those who abuse him. Jesus' crucifixion is both a travesty of justice (from a human perspective) and an astounding offering given by God. On the cross there is an offering of sorts taking place; Jesus is the giver, Jesus is the offering, and Jesus is the priest who is somehow mediating all of human enmity, hatred, and violence with Love (God is Love). May we remember and keep telling and retelling this story.

- How do you sense your actions or inactions have been wounding Jesus?
- What offerings has Jesus been making for you?
- Where do you sense Jesus serving you as giver, gift, and mediator with Love?

Prayer: Forgive me Jesus for the ways in which I wound you. Thank you for naming me your beloved child at the beginning, and for your offerings of love that never wane nor end. Amen.

Wednesday of Holy Week, Jesus' obedience

First Reading: Deuteronomy 27:1-3

Then Moses and the elders of Israel charged all the people as follows: Keep the entire commandment that I am commanding you today. ²On the day that you cross over the Jordan into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall set up large stones and cover them with plaster. ³You shall write on them all the words of this law when you have crossed over, to enter the land that the LORD your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

Background: If you want to remember something, write it down. Here Moses is instructing the Israelites to write the commandments on large stones and set them out for public display. Moses knows that without regular reminding, the people will forget.

Gospel Reading: Luke 6:32-38

'If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. 'Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.'

For Contemplation: Jesus continues with his theme of love. Have love for those with whom you are close, and love for those whom you are not. Practice love for those who will love you back, and love those who will not. Why? Because family members are supposed to love one another, and we are all family. All people are God's beloved children, and that makes us siblings with everyone else on the planet. It is for this family that God enters humanity in the person of Jesus and, on the cross, takes death into God's own being. The cross of Jesus Christ reveals God's intention to mend all this broken family. We instinctively know we are called to obediently love our family members. What we keep forgetting is that we are all siblings. Where might we write that down so we may remember?

- When have you lent or given something to someone outside of your immediate family recently (money, a listening ear, a kindness, etc.)?
- When has someone else lent something to you (money, a listening ear, a kindness, etc.)?
- What shifts inside you when you consider those events as having been among family?

Prayer: Thank you God for having given me family and friends; and thank you Jesus for knitting me together with others in the community of the church. Expand my vision, so that more and more I may regard others as siblings; then strengthen me to love my extended and ever-extending family. Amen.

Thursday of Holy Week, Jesus' compassion

First Reading: Deuteronomy 30:1-5

When all these things have happened to you, the blessings and the curses that I have set before you, if you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, ²and return to the LORD your God, and you and your children obey him with all your heart and with all your soul, just as I am commanding you today, ³then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, gathering you again from all the peoples among whom the LORD your God has scattered you. ⁴Even if you are exiled to the ends of the world, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will bring you back. ⁵The LORD your God will bring you into the land that your ancestors possessed, and you will possess it; he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors.

Background: Moses knows that in the future the Israelites will fail in their devotion and obedience to God. Here he is reminding them although there will be negative consequences (they will be driven out of the promised land), there will always be opportunities to turn and return to God who has the power and the will to restore their fortunes.

Gospel Reading: Luke 23:39-43

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' ⁴⁰But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' ⁴²Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' ⁴³He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

For Contemplation: We all fail in our devotion and obedience to God; some fail epically. Maybe in the grand scheme of things the epic failures have an advantage, for they know for sure that they cannot save themselves and will simply have to rely on God's compassion. Here, Jesus is hanging on the cross, gasping for breath, his life about to expire. There are only a few words left in him, yet they are words of compassion to an epic failure, "*Today (gasp for breath), you will be with me (gasp), in paradise (gasp).*" This is what God is offering us in and through our baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus, compassion. May our remembrance of Jesus' compassion on this day fill us with gratitude and free us from any illusion that we can ever be 'good enough' to win God's favor. It is already ours.

- When have you failed (ever epically)? How has forgiveness blessed you?
- Resisting forgiveness, are there ways you are still clinging to the hope of being 'good enough' to make up for past failures?
- How might more self-honesty about your failures and more openness to Jesus' forgiveness free you for more closely following the path of Love?

Prayer: Holy God, source of all love, on the night of his betrayal, Jesus gave us a new commandment, to love one another as he loves us. Write this commandment on our hearts and give us the will to serve others as he was the servant of all, your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.⁸

⁸ Prayer for Maundy Thursday from Evangelical Lutheran Worship.

Friday of Holy Week, Jesus' sacrifice

First Reading: Deuteronomy 30:6-10

Moreover, the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live. ⁷The LORD your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on the adversaries who took advantage of you. ⁸Then you shall again obey the LORD, observing all his commandments that I am commanding you today, ⁹and the LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings, in the fruit of your body, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your soil. For the LORD will again take delight in prospering you, just as he delighted in prospering your ancestors, ¹⁰when you obey the LORD your God by observing his commandments and decrees that are written in this book of the law, because you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Background: In this original setting, there are the circumcised (men of Israel) and the uncircumcised (men of the neighboring tribes); the women of course are separate too. Within Israel, there are the obedient (metaphorically described as circumcised in heart) and the disobedient. Israel as a whole has been depicted as particularly chosen of God, and thus blessed; whereas those who seek to war with Israel (or resist when Israel wars with them) shall be (according to Moses) cursed. There are certainly lots of divisions.

Gospel Reading: Luke 23:44-49

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.' Having said this, he breathed his last. ⁴⁷When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, 'Certainly this man was innocent.' ⁴⁸And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. ⁴⁹But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

For Contemplation: There certainly were lots of divisions among those present at Jesus' death: Jews and Romans, men with power and others including women without. On the cross, Jesus suffered and died for all of them, for all sinful humanity. In the story, we are told that the curtain in the temple is torn in two just as Jesus is actively dying. This curtain was what separated the holy from the profane (unholy). Now, in and through the death of Jesus, the holy and profane are bleeding into one another; Jesus' dying and rising will set in motion a great healing of division.

- On the cross we see Jesus' arms extended out to all; how are they being extended to you?
- To whom might Jesus be calling you to extend out your arms in a wider embrace?
- Where do you see evidence of the holy and unholy bleeding together in your life?

Prayer: Almighty God, look with loving mercy on your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, to be given over to the hands of sinners, and to suffer death on the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.⁹

⁹ The prayer of the day for Good Friday from Evangelical Lutheran Worship.

Saturday of Holy Week, God's love

First Reading: Deuteronomy 30:15-20

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. ¹⁶If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. ¹⁷But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, ¹⁸I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, ²⁰loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Background: Moses knows that we human beings have choices in life; some choices are life-giving, others end up being death-dealing. Moses commands the people to choose obedience as the path to life. What Moses does not know, however, is that because of the power of sin (that keeps turning us in on ourselves), we are unable to consistently choose the path that leads to life. We may have free will in lots of areas of our life (Coke or Pepsi, drugs or no-drugs); however, when it comes to God sin bends our will. Therefore, never able to climb up to God through obedience, God will have to come to us in mercy.

Gospel Reading: Luke 23:50-56

Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, ⁵¹had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. ⁵²This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁵³Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. ⁵⁴It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. ⁵⁵The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. ⁵⁶Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

For Contemplation: Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God has come down to us. On this Holy Saturday there is not much action in the story. Joseph of Arimathea tenderly wraps and then entombs Jesus' body, while the women prepare for anointing. What is not mentioned is either Jesus or God. God is Love; Love is always giving and receiving. As Trinitarian Christians we believe that within God's being there is a continual giving and receiving among the three-persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; except not on this day, for on the cross the Trinity has been severed. On this day, Jesus is in the place of death, and God the Father (or Holy Parent) is grieving. This is the curse Moses predicted. In Love, God has absorbed this curse.

- How is Jesus inviting you to rest in Love?
- On the eve of Easter, for what do you give thanks to God?

Prayer: Come down Lord Jesus and lift me in blessed love. Amen.

Easter Sunday, Resurrection promise

First Reading: Deuteronomy 31:7-8

Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel: 'Be strong and bold, for you are the one who will go with this people into the land that the LORD has sworn to their ancestors to give them; and you will put them in possession of it. ⁸It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.'

Background: Moses is preparing to die, and he is passing leadership to Joshua. Joshua will die a generation later, and leadership will be passed on again. Human leaders come and go, it is the presence and power of God that is the only constant.

Gospel Reading: Luke 24:1-11

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. ⁶Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' ⁸Then they remembered his words, ⁹and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

For Contemplation: Christ is risen! He has gone ahead of us, as the woman at the tomb have told us. He has gone on ahead to the place of death, gone on ahead to new life through resurrection from the dead, and gone on ahead through ascension into heaven; and now, through the pouring out of his Holy Spirit, this one who has gone ahead is here with us. He is with us! He will not fail or forsake us! Do not fear or dismayed! In all you face now, and in all that is to come, you shall never be alone; and as he is risen from the dead, so shall we rise too. This is the Easter Promise. Bask in this good news.

Prayer: God of mercy, we no longer look for Jesus among the dead, for he is alive and has become the Lord of life. Increase in our minds and hearts the risen life we share with Christ, and help us to grow as your people toward the fullness of eternal life with you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.¹⁰

¹⁰ Prayer of the day for Easter Sunday from Evangelical Lutheran Worship.